



Call for action from the 'Alliance Meeting'

19 and 20 March 2024 – Asuncion, Paraguay

A Catastrophe Approaches

Sky high prevalence of tuberculosis in Paraguayan prisons



Foreword

Both presenters and attendees of the 'prison TB Alliance Meeting,' organized by the EUSAT-RCS TB research consortium and convened in Asuncion, Paraguay on March 19th and 20th, 2024 acknowledge that within Latin American prisons, particularly in Paraguay, tuberculosis poses a formidable threat to inmates , staff, and the broader population.

The combination of overcrowded living conditions, exacerbated by a sharp rise in incarceration rates over the past two decades, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure provides fertile ground for the transmission of this infectious disease. Despite ongoing efforts to combat tuberculosis, prisons in Latin America are heading to a looming catastrophe.

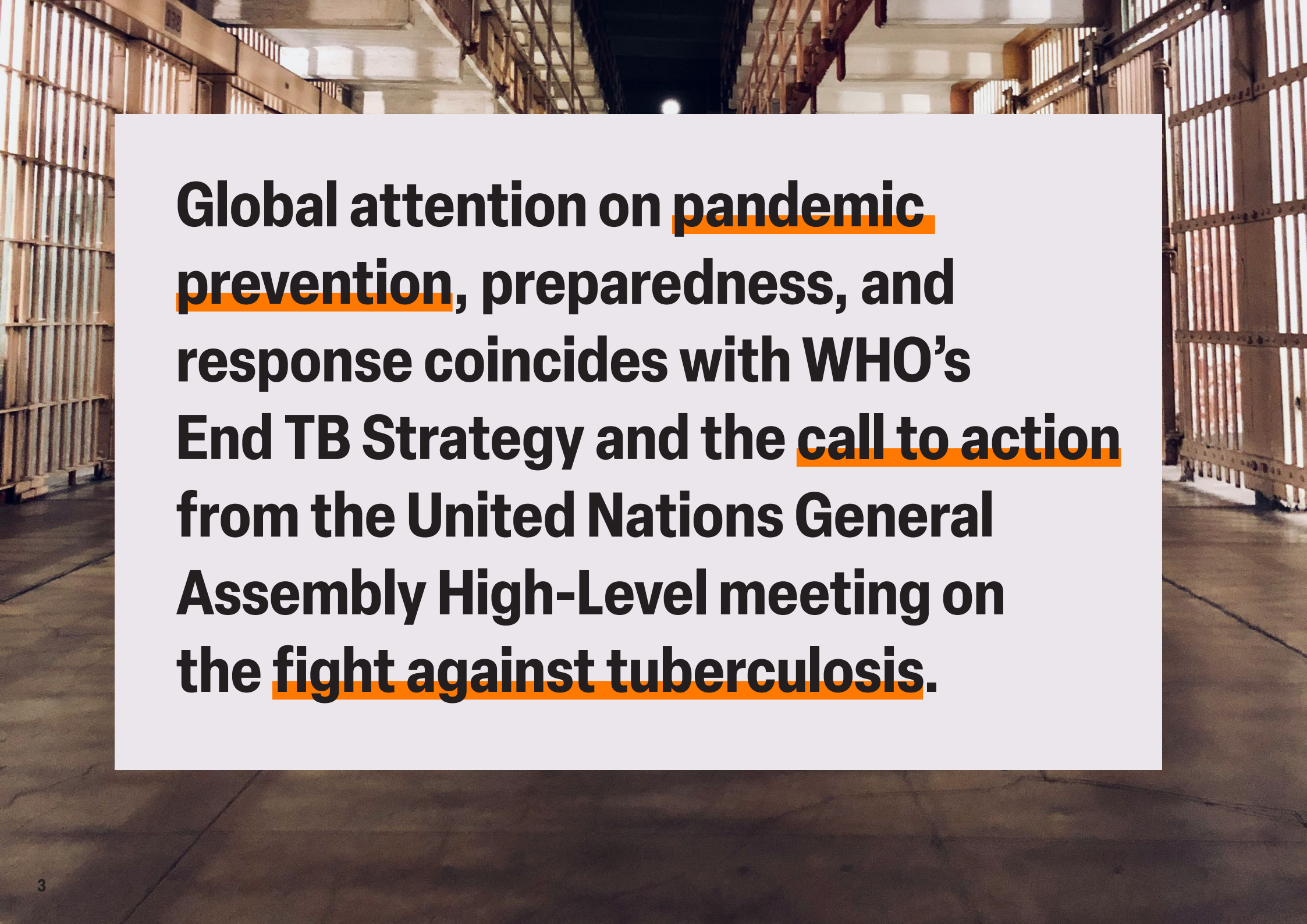
Urgent intervention is imperative to address the convergence of overcrowding, resource limitations, and tuberculosis prevalence, which could lead to a devastating outbreak among these already vulnerable populations. Swift action is necessary to avert this impending crisis and ensure the health and safety of all individuals within the prison system and beyond.

This White Paper, crafted by the consortium members, serves as a call for action. It offers valuable insight in the current health care threat and outlines necessary steps for policymakers, prison authorities and health care workers. While implementing every recommendation simultaneously may not be feasible, this document serves as a guide for enhancing the current situation.



Dr. Cecile Magis-Escurra,
EUSAT-RCS Consortium Coordinator

“Swift action is necessary to avert this impending crisis and ensure the health and safety of all individuals within the prison system and beyond.”



Global attention on pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response coincides with WHO's End TB Strategy and the call to action from the United Nations General Assembly High-Level meeting on the fight against tuberculosis.

Introduction

Due to extremely high incarceration rates, notably with a majority (65%) being pre-trial detainees, Paraguay's penal system has struggled to expand facilities adequately over the past decade. A recent study* revealed a strikingly high tuberculosis (TB) prevalence of 6.4%. This poses a severe threat to those in custody, persisting up to 7 years post-release. Compared to the general population's incidence rate of 48 per 100,000 inhabitants, the risk of developing TB in prisons is now over a 100 times higher.

Moreover, prisons, once considered closed environments, do act as important drivers for the TB incidence in the general population. Urgent action is imperative to curb this alarming trend.

* PriNose study: ClinicalTrials.gov ID: NCT04407325



Some statements of the PriNose study project participants

"It took 15 days to obtain a result"

"Tardaron 15 días con el resultado"

"Calculo que me podian matar tambien esa enfermedad"

"I guess this disease could also kill me"

"Easy and fast"

"Muy fácil y rapido"

"Encontramos más pacientes con tuberculosis que antes del proyecto"

"We found more tuberculosis patients than before the project"

"We actually like that"

"La verdad que nos gusta eso"

"Se está haciendo mejor"

"Things are improving"

"Obligatoriamente me trajeron"

"They forced me to come"

"It's better and they help us more"

"Es mejor y nos ayuda más"

Recommendations from speakers and attendees of the Alliance Meeting

1 Enhance health care services

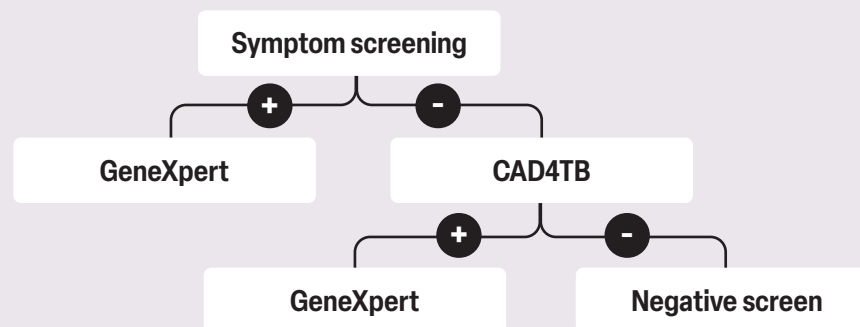
- > Improve access to prison health care services and facilities
- > Invest in health education
- > Follow WHO screening guidelines (at entrance, annual and exit)
- > Use most optimal screening algorithm according to modelling work
- > Immediate registration and start of treatment
- > Short course preventive treatment in case of latent TB infection

2 Improve living conditions

- > Avoid overcrowding
- > Wind-driven ventilation systems on the roofs to optimize air circulation

3 Evaluate followed approach

- > Funding for research and innovation of screening algorithms, 'new point of care diagnostics' and vaccines



Example of possible tuberculosis screening algorithm

Health is a fundamental human right

Equitable access to prevention, testing, treatment and care for all people deprived of liberty.

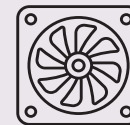
Required conditions

Working hand in hand

the Ministry of Health (MSPBS) and Justice (MoJ) hold the key to end the TB epidemic



Optimizing air circulation



TB screening

needs to become a mandatory measure

Dedicated team

to ensure an organized and effective approach to TB screening and treatment

Guaranteed resources

to ensure continuity of screening

Preventive treatment

for latent TB infections at exit screenings



Revision of the Paraguayan penal code

to decrease incarceration rates

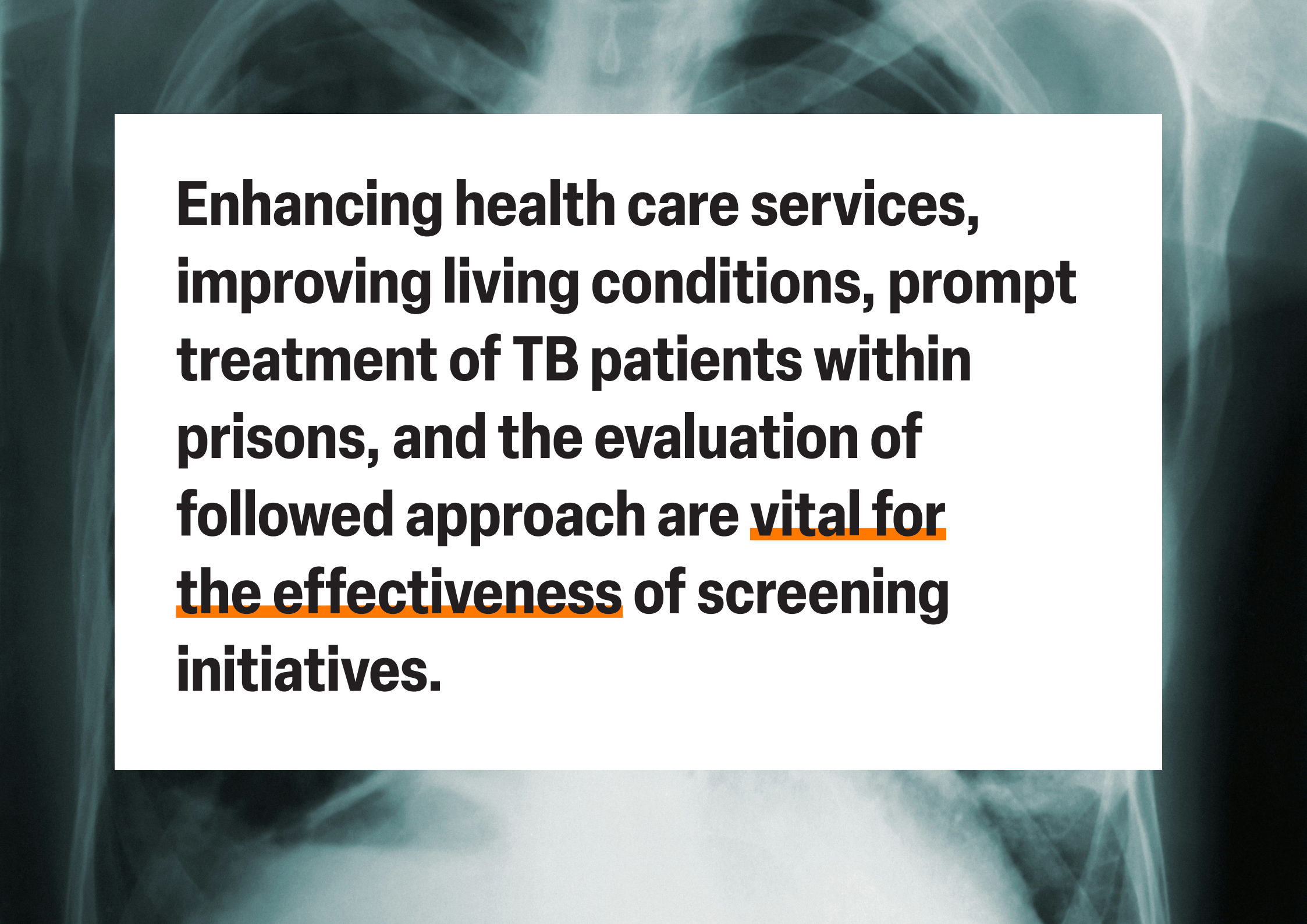


Raising awareness

among both inmates and staff about human rights and TB enhances access to health care

Centralized evaluation

of implemented measures is essential to gauge their effectiveness and explore new technologies



Enhancing health care services, improving living conditions, prompt treatment of TB patients within prisons, and the evaluation of followed approach are vital for the effectiveness of screening initiatives.

Proposed conditions explained

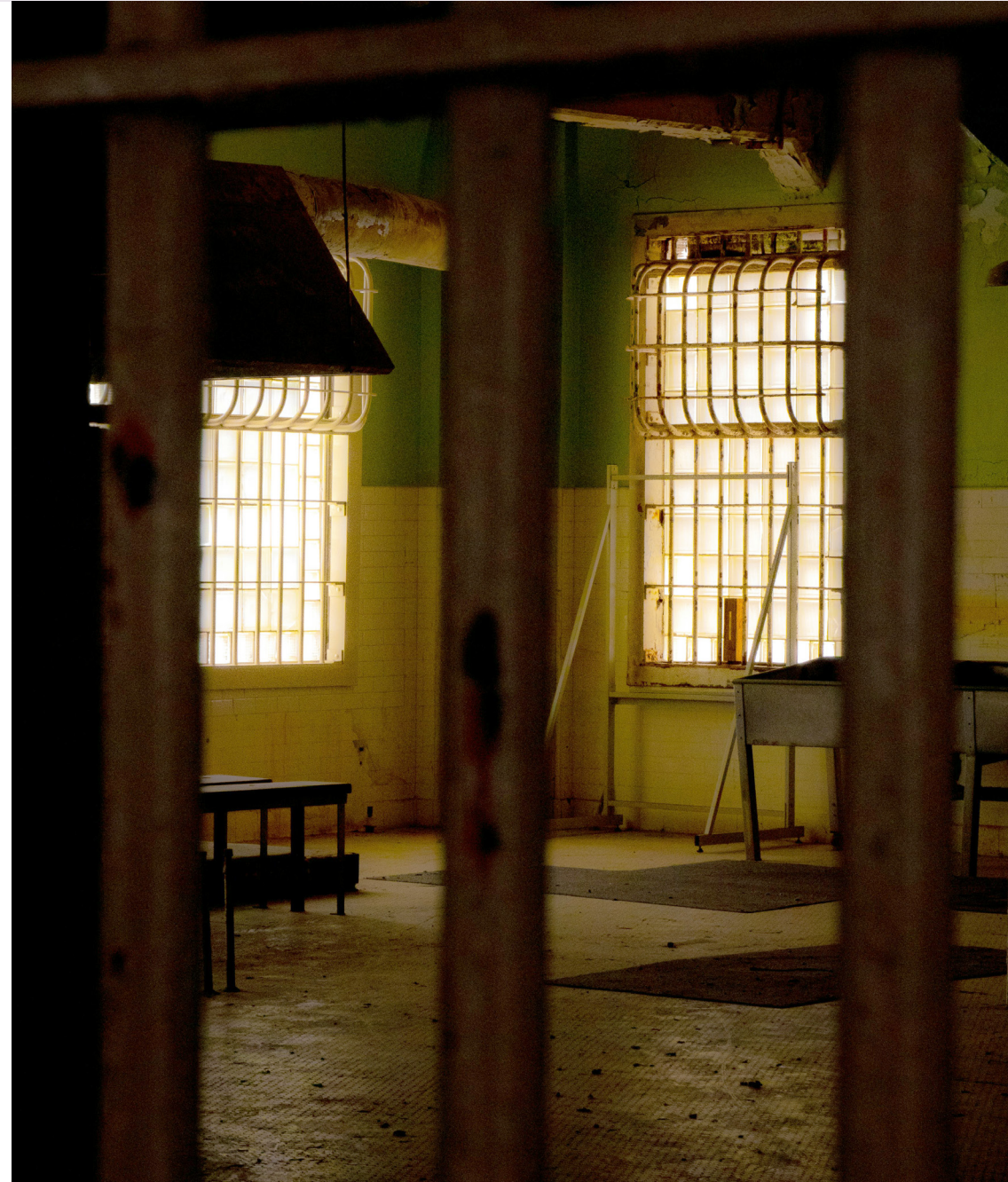
1 Enhance health care services

While some responsibilities fall under jurisdiction of Ministry of Health and others under Ministry of Justice, close collaboration and seamless coordination are paramount to start and finish TB treatment within the prisons but also to facilitate preventive treatment at release.

Providing health education for both inmates and staff will improve access to health care within correctional facilities. Currently, access depends on various factors, and this system does not always prioritize the most severely ill individuals or those with the greatest need.

A team of dedicated nurses and volunteers to diagnose, register, treat and follow up TB patients, to ensure an organized and effective approach.

Preventive treatment should be offered to individuals who are infected but not yet ill (latent TB infection) probably during exit screenings, thereby averting catastrophic costs for ex-detainees and their families.



Proposed conditions explained

2 Improve living conditions

A strategic plan for penal reforms to decrease current incarceration rates, aimed at preventing overcrowding and further instances of criminalization and substance abuse, especially in cases of innocence, is imperative.

The revision of the Paraguayan penal code needs to be considered to decriminalize certain offenses and update the code itself.

Alternatives to incarceration, such as the use of ankle bands, expedited trials, and social support, may be considered.

Ventilating cells with small (wind-driven) ventilation systems on the roofs will reduce bacterial load by increasing airchanges.



Proposed conditions explained

3 Evaluate followed approach

Centralized funding for mathematically modelling of possible screening approaches and the evaluation of implemented measures is essential to evaluate their effectiveness and provides an opportunity to assess the efficacy of promising new screening instruments.

Standardized datacollection from all prisons in Paraguay with the use of electronic case records evaluating the endorsed screening tools by the WHO, will be essential to evaluate specific approaches.



Call for action!

The incidence of tuberculosis in Paraguay will soon be influenced by the extreme prevalence of tuberculosis in prisons. It is time for immediate action and implementation of WHO screening algorithms and preventive treatment, along with improved access to health care facilities and living conditions.

Through these efforts, a difference can be made for many young lives in the coming decade, leading to better chances in life and more secured socio-economic levels for an already very marginalized group of people.

Good health as a human right!

Conclusion

Urgent measures such as bolstering healthcare infrastructure, exploring alternative punishments, fostering community engagement, ramping up screening and preventive treatment, and investing in research and development are imperative to avert a potential tuberculosis catastrophe in Paraguay.

Do you want to join us in our efforts to decrease TB prevalence in Latin American prisons?

Contact us via our website: Eusat-TB Research (eusattb.net)



The EUSAT-RCS TB research consortium aimed to build up a Latin-American-European research hub from 2019-2024. Different research projects have been finished within this collaboration network and a sustainable research network has been established. Future projects will focus on tuberculosis in prisons and other vulnerable groups.

